



Are You Finding Lady Beetles in Your House?

People say ladybugs bring you good luck. Well, you may not feel so lucky when you see too many of them. Last fall, large swarms of lady beetles were witnessed throughout Wisconsin. Many were also found inside buildings, which prompted numerous calls to the Wisconsin DNR from concerned homeowners. Here are some answers to the questions you may have.

Why do we see so many lady beetles in the fall?

The lady beetles congregate in clusters in the fall to find overwintering sites. It is believed that they emit an aggregation pheromone to attract other lady beetles of the same species. That is why lady beetles are especially conspicuous in October and November. The beetles are also noticeable in February and March on sunny warm days, because warmer weather makes them active.

What kind of lady beetles are they?

There are many different species of lady beetles in Wisconsin. However, the beetles that have been particularly noticeable in Wisconsin are called multicolored Asian lady beetles (Scientific name: *Harmonia axyridis*). They are oval, about 1/4 inch long and 3/16 inch wide, a little larger than other lady beetles. Their body is yellow to orange colored, and often with variable number of black spots on the back. They are also known as the Halloween Lady Beetle because of its pumpkin-color body and large populations found around Halloween time. This is an introduced species, and native to Asia. In the United States, the beetle was first found in Louisiana in 1988, and was first recorded in Wisconsin in 1994.

Are they harmful to human or house?

Lady beetles do not feed on wood, clothing, or human food. They feed on small insects, such as aphids, scales, and mealybugs. Lady beetles are actually beneficial in controlling some tree and garden pests. Although the beetles release smelly yellow liquid when stressed or crushed, which can stain walls and fabrics, this substance is harmless to humans.

Do they bite or sting?

They occasionally bite, but the bite should not be very painful. The beetles don't carry diseases that transmit to humans.

Do they multiply inside a house?

It may look as if these beetles are reproducing inside buildings because sometimes hundreds of lady beetles are still found inside only a few days after they are vacuumed. However, lady beetles do not reproduce indoors. They come into buildings through cracks and openings around windows, doors, siding, and utility pipes in search for hibernating sites. Once lady beetles are trapped inside the house in winter, they die within a few weeks due to lack of food and humidity.

How long do they live?

After eggs hatch in spring, it takes about a few weeks to become adult beetles, and they live as adults up to a few years.

What can I do to control them?

The best ways to prevent beetle entry are to seal cracks with a quality silicone or silicone-latex caulk, to repair door and window screens, and to install screen on attic and exhaust vents. Since beetles are attracted to light, they are usually found around windows and lighting fixtures. Once they are inside the house, vacuum or sweep the beetles to remove. Regular household insecticides that contain permethrin should be effective to kill the beetles for indoors (only certain Raid products contain permethrin. Make sure to use the product that contains permethrin). Bayer Advanced Home Products can be used both indoors and outdoors.

Is there any traps or baits available?

Although research continues, right now there is no traps or baits that are specific to lady beetles commercially available.

Did the Wisconsin DNR release these lady beetles?

No. Neither the Wisconsin DNR, DATCP (Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection), nor UW-Madison has released these beetles. However, the beetles were indeed released in 1916, in the mid sixties, and in 1978 to 1982 by USDA to control aphids and other tree infesting species. Release was made in California, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Ohio, Pennsylvania and other states, but not in Wisconsin. It is said that these releases were unsuccessful, and the population of the beetles was not established. It is believed that current populations originated from accidental introductions from Asian ships at the port of New Orleans.

What would happen in the future?

Some scientists predict that the populations will remain high for a while, and then decrease as natural enemies are established and reduce the number of lady beetles. In North Carolina, up to 25 percent of the beetle populations are parasitized by a tachinid fly. Praying mantis is one of lady beetles' predators.

Any other questions?

Please call Kyoko Scanlon at 715-365-8934.

Reference:

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Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Rhineland Service Center
October 12, 2000 Revised February, 2001